

# INTRODUCTION: CURATING AS COMPASSION

*Barbara Bickel & Darlene St. Georges*

*It is time for us to go deeper into our own knowledge systems, deeper into our story worlds. We must now go beyond what has been “discovered”; we must go beyond the colonizing constraints of Western theories and paradigms.*

—Archibald, Lee-Morgan & De Santolo, 2019, p.11



Spontaneous creation making play with bird-headed goddess (clay), June, 2020. © Barbara Bickel

We draw strength from creative practices and stories of lived experience that speak from and to a deep philosophy about humans' relationships with each other and more-than-human entities.

Acknowledging and “attending to this ethic of relationality honours systems of knowledge and knowing [that] are intricate, intellectual, living, and part of a larger framework of relationships that shape multiple realities” (Garcia, Tenakhongva, & Honyouti, 2019, p. 110).

An ethics of relationality engages holistically and creatively in meaning-making; to “involve the heart (emotions), mind (intellect), body (physical actions), and spirit (spirituality), as well as recognize the relationships of these realms to oneself, family, community, land/environment, and wider society” (Archibald, et al., 2019, p. 4). It provokes alternative understandings that can guide us to be better humans.

Indigenous scholars tell us that, traditionally, Elders sought knowledge about the outer world through their subjective inward journeys. They understood that making connections between the inner and outer realms of experience is how to expand knowledge, relationally (Ermine, 1996, 2011; Kelly, 2015; Manulani Aluli-Meyer; 2013).

Kimmerer (2013) tells us that creation cosmologies are a source of identity and our orientation to the world, teaching us about the responsibility that flows between humans, Other-than-human and the Earth. This is a relational ontology that is embodied with/in a creation research process (St. Georges, 2020);<sup>1</sup> a type of living inquiry that is accountable for knowledge that is connected holistically, with intellect, emotion, spirit, and the physical aspects of being (Absolon, 2011).

Critical creative practices and pedagogy can intensify our ability to gain deeper awareness when we engage ourselves; “attuning us to the fissures present in our current ways of being and thinking, and provoking in us critical reflexion about the ways in which we relate with the world; it changes our visual system, our hearing system, and our speaking system” (Trungpa, 2008, pp. 22–23), allowing us “to expand knowledge outward, in depth and toward the light” (Maori leader Mirini Maka Mead as cited in Aluli-Meyer, 2013b, p.1).

This is an approach to research and teaching that is not static, but generative and rooted in compassion. To practice “art as compassion,” as artist, psychoanalyst, activist and philosopher Bracha Ettinger teaches, is to understand that “[t]here will be no compassion without creativity” (Fox, 1979, p. 104). In a time when security and trust are rapidly eroding, we still can make, teach, inquire and learn through creativity and the arts. In doing so we can move closer to living with compassion “by fine attunements that evade the political systems” (Ettinger, n.d., n.p.). We launch this open access issue of *Artizein: Arts & Teaching Journal* in the midst of an unprecedented time of change, where the impact of failing political systems are fully visible and thus primed for radical attunements that we believe are best guided by fine attunements that emerge from ethical relationality and art as compassion.

This issue's open call brought forth a diversity of submissions that reflect the culture of uncertainty and possibilities for the arts and inquiry, teaching and learning in the Twenty-first Century. We offer this issue as a gift during a time of pandemic, ecological crisis, and racial and gender divides, with a desire to contribute to unmaking and making meaning through the arts; “it is how we develop our agency and exercise our voice. Art as something that is active and alive has an inherent link to our humanity, consciousness, and process of evolution; ... it is generative, fluid, and permeable. It moves and it is restless... It cannot be bound or replicated, which is the challenge that it

brings to research” (St. Georges, 2020, p. 90).

As our culture strives to develop ways of understanding and living life that holds compassion for humans and more-than-humans at its’ core, teachers of art can supply needed practices to assist living well through the changes. Carl Leggo (2019) calls educators to consider “what it means to be human in the creation, what it means to live in relationship with all of creation, what it means to resonate with voice and voices” (p.103);

If I can believe in an invisible net of worldwide  
interconnections in cyberspace, surely I can  
believe in the ecology of words and lines of care  
borne lightly in the heart, even the unbearable.

I will hold my friends through the blustery  
winds of winter into the promises of spring  
as I know they will hold me, in blood-beating  
heart and imagination and memory beyond  
all counting of tense time, in tenderness only.

(Carl Leggo, *Ecology*, [two stanzas] as cited in Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008, p. 96.)

Editors, similar to curators have a significant role to play in what is published and how author-artists are held as the blustering winds of the publication/exhibiting process unfolds. In the last two issues of Artizein, guest editor Susan Walsh and Barbara Bickel described their editing process as a feminist “relational co-evolving model of generative peer dialogue” (Bickel & Walsh, 2018, p. 10). This issue builds upon the feminist relational model and swerves it toward curating with care and compassion for restoration and transformation. The definition of the word curator includes ‘one who cares for.’ Care for the collection of art and writings in this issue in an aesthetical and ethical relational paradigm includes care for both the creation and the creator. In conversations with the authors during the editing process an author shared that this way of curating a journal is a needed alternative to the traditional gate-keeper role of the editor in academia. We believe that the reader/viewer/listener of the offerings in this issue will also be impacted by the field of care that was established in the full editing process.

### ***Editor’s Curatorial Process***

Submissions went through the traditional blind peer review, but once accepted the authors worked closely and in dialogue with the editors, to at times restore, and at other times transform their pieces. Sotomayor, a contributor to this issue, “uses the term curator to describe the actions of an educator who is creating, implementing, and sharing a pedagogical approach that centers on co-creating knowledge with care and stewardship (Sotomayor, 2020).” We echo her description and share below the steward process that we engaged as editors of this issue, in a manner that contemporary feminist curators describe as “taking care to power” (Horne et al, 2016, p. 124).

Tenets include:

- a gift economy as a foundation for building a creative scholarly circle of care, criticality and connectivity,
- inclusion of emerging, mid and mature scholarly and creative contributions,
- a relational ontology,
- not being in denial of the time of atrocity we are living in,
- addressing aesthetics first, with ethics emerging from the aesthetic, and lastly politics with a return to aesthetics

at the end of the process.

Process included:

- blind peer review,
- editors not as gate keepers but as nurturers of the individual and their story (parts and whole),
- curatorial mentoring
  - development of the capacity of author-artists / artist-authors
  - to bring forward the aesthetic and academic strength of each article, poem, essay, visual essay,
- keeping the issue current and context relevant for artist teachers working in today's world.

### **Overview of Contributions**

Two significant themes presented themselves, despite being an open call for submissions. They reflect the cascading crisis times we are living into and the desire to take pedagogic action through inquiry, writing and artmaking. The image cover created by Darlene St. Georges and found in this issue on p. 88, brings the natural world's intelligence and beauty to the fore of this issue. A reminder that birds and particularly Corvids such as the crow can be guiding teachers of change for humans in these times of entering the mysteries of the dark. Poignantly, the authors-artists turn us to question and rethink our practices of ecological and human relations, in and through the significant teaching and learning struggles and the complexity involved.

**Section one** dwells in gifts; of art, relationships, nature and spirit. Drawing a relational thread to prior Artizein issues the journal opens with a found poem co-created by the contributors of the past 2 issues, as the *Contemplative Arts Collective*. This opening poem proffers a strong thread to the creative contributions of the teachings and learnings that precede us. *Gerofsky, Barney and Gerard's* article follows by literally taking on the notion of paying it forward that Dr. Leggo's teachings inspired in the previous two-part special issue of Artizein. They situate their collaboration in the gift economy that is flourishing in this time of coronavirus, cultivating the relational gift as they build a caring community through their shared experience. A visual essay of relational evocations in the forest then unfolds leading us into the gift of a walking a/r/tographic inquiry by *Chung*. Following the forest walk with *Chung*, emergent strands of a contemplative and artful méttisage co-created by *Mitchell, Phillips, Traill, Walsh, Bickel, Bartley, & McConachy* braids together still and moving images, sound audio, story and poetry. In this méttisage the reader/listener/viewer is guided into the sacred worldview that holds the inquiry, learning and teachings of these 7 co-inquirers. *Nicole Rallis* then guides readers into Pacific Spirit Park on an ecopedagogical poetic wandering, which is followed by Earthen lessons for rematriation with Nature that are then re-ordered through the tellings of bird or woman; as *Fidyk* and *St. Georges* invoke the Goddess with her call to live well with the dark side of life at the troubled edge we now live looking down into. *Pente* walks us into an Alberta farm field and engages land-based performance art with the virtual aid of GPS technology in a visual poetry essay, as she expands traditional understandings of landscape art. *Hauk* and *Kippen* carry on the environmental theme and teach a relational game they call the "Verge" as a research method that introduces environmental and arts-based educational scholars to an innovative approach to research data interpretation, with the ability to re-center non-dominant insights and ways of knowing.

**Section two** enters a critical and compassionate inquiry into identities and the navigation of complex relations in learning, unlearning and remembering. The lived experience of teaching those with marginalized black identities in a dominantly white American university is vulnerably expressed in a co-taught university course by *Sotomayor & Porterfield*. This critical self-reflective teaching article navigates the nepantla space of the classroom, showing us the



difficulties encountered in the crossing of worlds in a racially divided culture. *Snowber & Odabashian*, next invite the reader/viewer into a celebration of reclamation as they carry the threads of inexpressible familial hauntings of the Armenian genocide through the creation of beauty sourced from the heart in their poetic and visual art dialogue. A love imbued conversation between poetry and prose carries the thread further in *Downey and Sagy's* article of emergent songs to the Earth and each other as respectively, diasporic and Indigenous colleagues engaging with relational entanglement(s) of reconciliation in the curriculum of life. *Adams* follows by entering a learning and unlearning journey through her art and poetry, as she grapples with the complexities of respectful reconciliation practices with the land, as a settler living and creating on Treaty land. *Morrison's* article then explores her identity and offers insight into being a teaching artist in the public school system, as she passionately articulates the priority of bringing the arts back into the school system to assist youth recover and regenerate themselves through the arts in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic. Drawing the many threads of heart, mind, body and spirit found in this issue to a reflective pause, *London's* story connects the spiritual passage from death to life with the arts, as his powerful art images join the Heavens with the Earth. We are pleased to include Artizein's first book review, written by *Nicole Rallis* that introduces readers to *Adrian Schoone's* 2020 book entitled "Constellations of Alternative Education Tutors: A Poetic Inquiry." We hope her overview of this book inspires you to look further into Schoone's scholarship on poetic inquiry.

At the heart of this collection are ethical relational entanglements. These relationships are not simple, rather they are interconnected, complex, dynamic, and filled with responsibility for community, language, ontologies, environments, the cosmos, and diverse ideologies (Garcia, Tenakhongva, & Honyouti, 2019). The contributions of this Journal issue are a telling of stories; of a self-in-relation, that invite us to consider an embodied and inspirited way of being and becoming in the world (Aoki, 2005). We invite you to wander through this issue and find sacred spaces for moments of pause, questioning and reflection within your own life as artist-teacher and learner.

Barbara Bickel & Darlene St. Georges

## ENDNOTE

1. We draw upon creation-research as theorized by St. Georges (2020), wherein inquiry is an inspirited relational inward and outward journey; a storying praxis that resists fixedness and is rooted in spirit and creation. It is critically fluid and is in motion, tangling through complexity and multiplicity in our relational realms of experience. Creation is intentionally positioned first, flipping research-creation to creation-research because (CR) is rooted in insight from Indigenous scholars who tell us that making connections between the inner and outer realms of experience is a way to expand knowledge, relationally (Cajete, 1993; Deloria, 2012; Ermine, 1996; Kelly, 2015; Kimmerer, 2013; Meyer, 2013).

## REFERENCES

- Absolon [Minogizhigokwe], K. E. (2011). *Kaandossiwin: How we come to know*. Halifax, Canada: Fernwood Publishing.
- Archibald, J. [Q'um Q'um Xiiem], Lee-Morgan, J., DeSantolo, J. (2019). *Decolonizing research: Indigenous story work as methodology*. London, England: Zed Books.
- Bickel, B, Walsh, S, & Conrad, D. (2018). An Art-Based Contemplative Pause: Introduction to Part 1: Sharing Radical Creative Possibilities, *Artizein: Arts and Teaching Journal* 3(1), 6-11.  
<https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/atj/vol3/iss1/>

- Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*. Tonasket, WA: J Charlton Publishing.
- Deloria, V., Jr. (2012). *The metaphysics of modern existence* (2nd ed.). Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.
- Ermine, W. (1996). Aboriginal Epistemology. In M. Battiste, & M. Barmand (Eds.), *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 101–112). Vancouver, Canada: UBC Press.
- Ermine, W. (2011). NCCIH | CCNSA (2011, Dec. 20). *Willie Ermine on knowledge transfer* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/33951249>
- Ettinger, Bracha. (N.D.). *Bracha Ettinger: Compassion and Com-passion. Underfire*. Retrieved July 20, 2020 at <http://jordancrandall.net/main/+UNDERFIRE/site/files/q-node-512.html>
- Fox, M. (1979). *A spirituality named compassion and the healing of the global village, Humpty Dumpty and us*. Minneapolis, Minnesota; Winston Press.
- Garcia, J., Tenakhongva, S., & Honyouti, B. (2019). Indigenous teachers: At the cross-roads of applying Indigenous research methodologies. In S. Windchief, & T. San Pedro (Eds.), *Applying indigenous research methods: Storying with peoples and communities* (pp.104–121). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Horne, V., Loyd, K., Richards, J., Spencer, C.. (2016). Taking Care: Feminist Curatorial Pasts, Presents and Futures. *Curating in Feminist Thought*, Issue 29, May, 16-129. <https://www.on-curating.org/issues.html>
- Kelly, V. (2015). To see, to know, to shape, to show: The path of an Indigenous artist. In S. Walsh, B. Bickel, & Leggo, C. (Eds.), *Arts-based and contemplative practices in research and teaching: Honouring presence* (pp. 46–65). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.
- Leggo, C. (2008). Ecology. In M. Cahnmann-Taylor & R. Siegesmich (Eds.). *Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Leggo, C. (2019). Book review: Place, being, resonance: A critical echohermeneutics approach to education. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* (JCACS) 16(20).
- Meyer, M. A. (Hawai'i) (2013a). *Holographic epistemology: Native common sense*. China Media Research, 9(2), 94–100. Retrieved from <http://www.chinamediaresearch.net/index.php/back-issues?id=58>
- Meyer, M. A. (Hawai'i) (2013b). The context within: My journey into research. In D. Mertens, F. Cram, & B. Chilisa (Eds.), *Indigenous pathways into social research: Voices of a new generation* (pp. 247–260). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Pinar, W., & Irwin, R. (2005). *Curriculum in a new Key: The collective works of Ted. T. Aoki*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sotomayor, L. C. (2020) *Curating educational spaces with autohistoria-teoría and conocimiento: a decolonial feminist teacher inquiry* [Doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University]. <https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/catalog/17722lc5008>
- St. Georges, D. (2020). *A creation-research Indigenous métissage* [Doctoral dissertation, Concordia University]. [https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/986826/1/St.Georges\\_PhD\\_%20F2020.pdf](https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/986826/1/St.Georges_PhD_%20F2020.pdf)
- Trungpa, T. (2008). *True perception: The path of dharma art* (J. Lief, Ed.). (2nd ed. Rev., expanded ed. of Dharma art. 1996. Copyright 1994, 1996, Diana J. Mukpo). Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.

